

The Single-Item Need for Consistency Scale

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ABSTRACT - Despite the applicability of the preference for consistency (PFC) scale to multiple real-world settings, the large number of items limits its use in field studies. To ease this restriction, we constructed and tested a single-item measure (i.e., the single-item need for consistency scale—SIN-C). Through three studies ($N \sim 1000$), we examined the concurrent validity of a single-item need for consistency scale with the PFC in a student sample (Study 1), the test-retest reliability of the SIN-C across four months (Study 2), and the construct validity of the SIN-C in a diverse international sample (Study 3). Overall, the SIN-C showed good reliability and validity, supporting its use in future research.

Consistency theories have thrived for many decades. In general, they suggest that people desire themselves and others to be consistent in their behaviors. However, the extent to which people desire consistency varies from person to person. Consequently, it is important to reliably measure preference for consistency as an individual difference. To address this need, the preference for consistency (PFC) scale emerged (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995). The scale demonstrates relationships with many attitudes and behaviors, including rigidity, compliance, persuasion, self-consciousness, need for structure, and some Big Five traits (Cialdini et al., 1995; Guadagno & Cialdini, 2010). Despite the contribution of the PFC, the 18-item scale does not conveniently measure consistency where it matters most—in the real world.

The need for brief, efficient measures has increased dramatically in the past decade. This trend has followed changes in personality research, including increased demands on participants' time and researchers' desires to look beyond student samples to populations more central to their research questions (Widaman, Little, Preacher, & Sawalani, 2011). For example, much of the current research uses longitudinal studies (e.g., daily diary studies), mass-testing sessions (e.g., participant prescreening), and field research (e.g., organizational settings). Researchers have met this need by developing efficient versions of popular personality measures. These include the Big Five (Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2009; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann Jr., 2003; Rammstedt & John, 2007), narcissism (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006), the "Dark Triad" (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, & psychopathy; Jonason & Webster, 2010; Webster & Jonason, 2013), and impulsivity and sensation seeking (Webster & Crysel, 2012).

Despite the contribution brief measures have made to personality research, assessing personality with several items is not possible in all research settings. Consequently, researchers often have to exclude several measures of interest, specifically in longitudinal

and field designs. Ideally, researchers could measure important constructs with one item without sacrificing much reliability or validity. As a result, many single-item measures have recently appeared in the literature. These include measures of self-esteem (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001), the Big Five (Woods & Hampson, 2005), belongingness (Nichols & Webster, 2013), job satisfaction (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997), religious orientation (Hettler & Cohen, 1998), and attitudes towards advertisements or brands (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007). While single-item scales have their critics, evidence suggests that they can be both valid and reliable (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Cunny & Perri, 1991; Dollinger & Malmquist, 2009; Gardner, Cummings, Dunham, & Pierce, 1998; Wanous & Hudy, 2001; Wanous et al., 1997). Some single-item measures can even outperform their multiple-item counterparts in their ability to explain variance in related constructs (Nagy, 2002). In the present research, we provide three studies ($N \approx 1,000$) to validate a new single-item measure of consistency—the Single-item Consistency Scale (SIN-C).

Study 1

In Study 1, our goal was to test the concurrent validity of the SIN-C with the preference for consistency scale. To do this, we included the long form of the scale in a questionnaire administered at the beginning of a semester to a large participant pool. We also examined the construct validity of the SIN-C and PFC with social desirability.

Method

Participants

Participants were 701 undergraduates (61% women) at the University of Florida and were mostly European American (59%).

Measures

Participants completed the long form of the preference for consistency scale (PFC; $\alpha = .88$; Cialdini et al., 1995) on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) along with over 100 other items from scales unrelated to the current research. An example item is, "The appearance of consistency is an important part of the image I present to the world." The questionnaire also included the 33-item Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (SDS; $\alpha = .75$; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), which measures people's likelihood of responding in ways desirable to others. Participants indicated whether each statement was true (1) or false (0). Because we imbedded these scales into a larger questionnaire, effects of demand on participants were unlikely (Nichols & Maner, 2008).

Results and Discussion

Construct, Content, and Face Validity

To determine the best item in the PFC, we first examined the average inter-item correlations between each of the eighteen items. One item outperformed the other seventeen: "I make an effort to appear consistent to others." Due to the strong relationships that it demonstrated with the other items and the strong face validity of the item, we chose this item as the new single-item need for consistency scale (SIN-C). The average correlation between the SIN-C and the other seventeen PFC items was .37 and

ranged from .20 to .62. In contrast, the mean inter-item correlation between the other items was .28 and ranged from -.05 to .64. In addition, the correlation between the SIN-C and PFC was .71 (.66 when we remove the SIN-C from the full PFC). The average correlation between the remaining seventeen items and the PFC was .56 and ranged from .39 to .70.

In general, and across both scales, women reported a higher need for consistency than did men (SIN-C: $M_{Men} = 5.36$, $SD = 1.85$; $M_{Women} = 5.79$, $SD = 1.87$), $t(688) = 2.96$, $p < .05$, (PFC: $M_{Men} = 5.54$, $SD = 1.08$; $M_{Women} = 5.73$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(694) = 2.24$, $p < .05$. The PFC and SIN-C also demonstrated similar relationships with the SDS (SIN-C: $r = .06$, $p = .12$; PFC: $r = .04$, $p = .34$). In sum, the SIN-C showed superior psychometrics, independent of and in relation to the other PFC items. In addition, Study 1's findings suggest strong convergence between the SIN-C and PFC; these measures correlated highly with each other and similarly related to the SDS. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for all scales.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics by Study for the SIN-C and PFC

Scale	Overall						Men						Women					
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skew</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skew</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skew</i>
Study 1																		
SIN-C	692	5.62	6.00	5.00	1.88	-0.48	270	5.36	5.00	5.00	1.85	-0.52	420	5.79	6.00	5.00	1.87	-0.49
PFC	698	5.65	5.67	5.61	1.12	-0.40	272	5.54	5.61	5.61	1.08	-0.68	424	5.73	5.78	5.67	1.13	-0.27
Study 2*																		
SIN-C	65	6.06	6.00	6.00	1.45	-0.67	20	5.67	5.88	5.33	1.53	-0.85	43	6.27	6.50	6.00	1.42	-0.65
PFC	66	6.06	6.35	6.53	1.30	-0.77	20	5.57	5.88	6.53	1.39	-0.78	44	6.36	6.54	6.54	1.15	-0.83
Study 3																		
SIN-C	200	6.77	7.00	8.00	1.80	-1.16	98	7.00	8.00	8.00	1.67	-1.10	99	6.54	7.00	8.00	1.92	-1.14
PFC	200	6.37	6.47	7.17	1.09	-0.25	98	6.38	6.44	7.17	1.06	-0.17	99	6.37	6.61	7.11	1.13	-0.32

Note. *Averaged across four time points. SIN-C: Single-Item Need for Consistency Scale. PFC: Preference for Consistency Scale.

Study 2

Study 1 provided preliminary evidence of the SIN-C's concurrent validity with the full PFC. It also provided initial support for the discriminant validity of the SIN-C (i.e., via social desirability). In Study 2, we sought to extend these findings by examining the test-retest reliability of the SIN-C and comparing it to that of its longer, "parent" scale.

Method

Participants

Participants were 66 undergraduates (67% women) ranging in age from 18-23 ($M = 20.29$, $SD = 1.17$) at the University of Florida who completed items for at least one of four time points. The majority of the sample was European American (61%).

Measures

We administered a questionnaire to participants at four time points each approximately a month apart. Study 2 used the same measure as Study 1. We administered the 18-item PFC to participants at four time points each approximately one month apart ($M_\alpha = .93$). See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

Test-Retest Reliability and Stability

To measure test-retest reliability for the SIN-C, we used the procedure developed by Heise (1969, Equation 9). This procedure allows for an estimate of test-retest reliability that separates true change from measurement error in a single-item. Essentially, it estimates the reliability of a single-item scale based on its pattern of autocorrelations over three time points— $r_{xx} = \frac{(r_{12}r_{23})}{r_{13}}$. Because we had four time points, we were able to compute this estimate twice (times 1–3, times 2–4). The mean reliability estimate for the SIN-C across both estimates was .73. See Table 2 for all temporal correlations.

Concurrent and Construct Validity

The mean correlation between the SIN-C and the PFC was .81 (Times 1–4: .76, .85, .80, and .82). Similarly, when we removed the SIN-C from the PFC, the average correlation between the SIN-C and this 17-item PFC (PFC-17) was .78 (Times 1–4: .71, .83, .77, and .80). After correcting for attenuation, the mean correlation between the SIN-C and PFC was .97 (.93 with the PFC-17). This suggests that the SIN-C explains most of the reliable variance in the PFC.

Table 2
Study 2 Temporal Correlations

	SIN-C	PFC
Times 1→2	.66**	.87**
Times 2→3	.56**	.94**
Times 3→4	.73**	.92**
Times 1→3	.47**	.86**
Times 2→4	.61**	.89**
Times 1→4	.53**	.82**

Note. SIN-C: Single-Item Need for Consistency Scale. PFC: Preference for Consistency Scale. ** $p < .01$

Study 3

Study 3 had two new goals. First, we sought to examine the validity and reliability of the SIN-C and its parent scale within a nonstudent population. Second, we aimed to examine the construct validity of the SIN-C with other measures in the nomological network of preference for consistency.

Method

Participants

Participants were 200 adults (50% men) aged 18–66 years ($M = 28.91$, $SD = 9.64$) who completed an online questionnaire via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Participants came from nearly 30 countries, and

possessed a wide range of educational attainment (49% bachelor's degree, 17% some college, 16% masters degree, 11% high school diploma).

Measures

Consistency. Study 3 used the same consistency measures as Studies 1 and 2. That is, participants completed the 18-item Preference for Consistency scale on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) (PFC; $\alpha = .86$; Cialdini et al., 1995). Imbedded in the original scale was the SIN-C - "I make an effort to appear consistent to others."

Internal Locus of Control. Participants completed the Internal, 8-item, portion of the Multidimensional Locus of Control Scales on a scale ranging from -3 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*) (Levenson, 1973a; 1973b). Several studies have confirmed the scale's validity and reliability (Levenson, 1973a; 1973b; 1981; Levenson & Miller, 1976). An example item is, "Whether or not I get to be a leader depends mostly on my ability." Locus of control has previously exhibited weak yet nonsignificant positive relationships with the preference for consistency (Cialdini et al., 1995).

Mental Flexibility. Participants completed the 7-item Acceptance and Action Questionnaire – II on a scale ranging from 1 (*never true*) to 7 (*always true*) (Bond et al., 2011). Past research confirms its strong psychometric properties (Bond et al., 2011). An example item is, "Emotions cause problems in my life." Mental rigidity (i.e., the opposite of mental flexibility) has previously exhibited strong positive relationships with the preference for consistency (Cialdini et al., 1995).

Need for Structure. Participants completed the 12-item Personal Need for Structure scale on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) (Thompson, Naccarato, Parker, & Moskowitz, 2001). Independent researchers have provided strong support for the scale's reliability and validity (Neuberg & Newsome, 1993). An example item is, "I like to have a place for everything and everything in its place." Need for structure has previously exhibited strong positive relationships with the preference for consistency (Cialdini et al., 1995).

Big Five. Participants completed the Ten-Item Personality Inventory on a scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). Specifically, they indicated their agreement or disagreement that each of the 10 statements applied to them (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). The scale is a widely used measure of the "Big 5" personality factors and has good validity and reliability (Gosling et al., 2003). An example statement is, "Dependable, self-disciplined." Relationships between each factor and preference for consistency varies (Cialdini et al., 1995). Extraversion and Openness previously exhibited strong negative relationships with the PFC while Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability have exhibited weak, yet nonsignificant, positive relationships with the PFC.

Private Self-Consciousness. Participants completed the 9-item Private portion of the Self-Consciousness Scale on a scale ranging from 0 (*not like me*) to 3 (*a lot like me*) (Scheier & Carver, 1985). The scale has good psychometric properties (Scheier & Carver, 1985). An example question is, "I'm quick to notice changes in my mood."

Public Self-Consciousness. Participants completed the 7-item Public portion of the Self-Consciousness Scale on a scale ranging from 0 (*not like me*) to 3 (*a lot like me*) (Scheier & Carver, 1985). The scale has good psychometric properties (Scheier &

Carver, 1985). An example item is, "I'm usually aware of my appearance." Self-consciousness has previously exhibited moderate positive relationships with the preference for consistency (Cialdini et al., 1995).

Self-Esteem. Participants completed the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) (Rosenberg, 1965). It is one of the most widely used scales in the world and has good psychometric properties (Crandal, 1973). An example item is, "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself." Self-esteem has previously exhibited small, yet nonsignificant, negative relationships with the preference for consistency (Cialdini et al., 1995).

Results and Discussion

The correlation between the SIN-C and PFC was .70 (.65 with the PFC-17). A correlated vectors analysis (i.e., the relationship between the pattern of correlations produced by the PFC and the SIN-C; Jensen, 1998) additionally suggested that the two measures showed similar correlations with all other measures, $r = .85$ (see Table 3). Specifically, the mean deviation between the correlations of the PFC and SIN-C with the other measures was .04. Both measures were significantly related to conscientiousness, flexibility, locus of control, need for structure, private self-consciousness, and public self-consciousness. In contrast, the PFC and SIN-C were not significantly related to emotional stability, extraversion, openness, and self-esteem.

Table 3
Study 3 Correlations

	SIN-C	PFC	α
Agreeableness	0.12	0.16*	.29
Conscientiousness	0.30**	0.36**	.39
Emotional Stability	-0.07	-0.10	.52
Extraversion	0.02	0.08	.47
Locus of Control	0.29**	0.31**	.69
Mental Flexibility	0.19**	0.17*	.88
Need For Structure	0.35**	0.53**	.78
Openness	-0.12	-0.06	.18
Private Self-Consciousness	0.18*	0.24**	.74
Public Self-Consciousness	0.33**	0.39**	.80
Self-Esteem	-0.01	0.02	.74

Note. SIN-C: Single-Item Need for Consistency Scale. PFC: Preference for Consistency Scale ($\alpha = .86$).

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

General Discussion

Consistency remains one of the most discussed and theorized psychological concepts. As such, it is important to have a reliable, valid measure that allows researchers to examine consistency in many research settings. Across three studies, we validated the Single-Item Need for Consistency scale (SIN-C). First, we examined the amount of shared variance between the SIN-C and the PFC. The SIN-C showed acceptable concurrent validity with this popular consistency measure, and shared a similarly small amount of variance with social desirability. Next, we examined the test-retest reliability

of the SIN-C and used this measure to determine the amount of variance shared between the SIN-C and PFC. The SIN-C showed good reliability and explained most of the variance of the PFC. Finally, we examined the nomological network of the PFC in a diverse international sample. The SIN-C and PFC demonstrated similar relationships with all measured variables.

Overall, these results support the use of the SIN-C in future consistency research. Unlike the longer PFC, the SIN-C allows researchers to measure consistency in novel settings that require efficiency. As more research turns to longitudinal designs, and participants' time and attention become increasingly limited, single-item measures provide an effective and efficient way to measure important constructs related to one's research questions, or to control for variables suspected to affect relationships of interest. By testing the psychometric properties of the SIN-C and showing its similarity to the parent scale, the present research provides a means for researchers to measure consistency without the time and space resources that accompany multiple-item measures.

Limitations and Future Directions

In the current research, we examined both student and nonstudent samples through online and offline administrations of the SIN-C. However, all of our student samples were from a large state-funded institutions and our community sample was largely from countries other than the U.S. Future research should continue to examine the SIN-C in other populations and settings. In particular, research should further examine the psychometric properties of the SIN-C and determine if the SIN-C provides a valid and reliable measure universally, regardless of age, sex, or culture. Finally, research must examine behavioral outcomes to determine the ability of the SIN-C to predict real-world behavior.

Conclusion

Across three studies, the current research provides support for the use of a single item to measure people's need or preference for consistency. The face-valid SIN-C demonstrated good reliability (internal and test-retest) and validity (content, concurrent, predictive, convergent, and discriminant). The SIN-C was strongly related to the PFC, and exhibited similar relationships with other variables. In all, the SIN-C appears to be a valid and reliable measure of consistency, and provides a convenient way to assess consistency in a variety of novel samples and research settings.

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